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The Bush administration should do all it can to prevent Afghanistan from slipping back into the savage religious oppression its ousted Taliban rulers practiced.

The **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom** has consistently called for efforts to ensure that Afghanistan weaves respect for human rights and religious freedoms into its constitution and social structures.

But in its latest annual report, the government commission says the Bush administration and its international allies helping to stabilize Afghanistan seem not to have recognized the warning signs of religious oppression. They aren't doing enough to counteract them.

"Afghanistan," says the commission's new report, "is being reconstructed as a state in which an extreme interpretation of Sharia (Islamic law) would be enforced by a government which the United States supports ... U.S. public and congressional support for Afghanistan's reconstruction will be eroded" if Afghanistan doesn't protect and respect "universal human rights, including freedom of religion and belief, and the rights of women and minorities."

Part of the problem is that President Hamid Karzai's government doesn't control much of the country beyond the capital, Kabul. Elsewhere, brutal warlords engage in "torture, arbitrary arrest, extrajudicial killings and politically motivated disappearance," the commission says.

As the Taliban once did, the warlords permit accusations of religious apostasy, blasphemy and "offending Islam" to be treated as if they were crimes forbidden by a legitimate

constitution. Press reports suggest warlords also are seizing hundreds of millions of dollars that belong to the central government.

The goal in Afghanistan should be a stable country that constitutionally guarantees freedom of religion. The country should not be allowed to revert to a prison run by religious thugs.